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ABSTRACT

This practicum developed a support group for parents of learning-disabled adolescents at the high school level, to explore career opportunities, adolescent behavior, and postsecondary academic settings. The practicum project surveyed parents concerning their interest in a parent support group, formed volunteer parent committees, arranged for guest speakers including a psychologist and a representative from a vocational rehabilitation agency, and organized a College and Career Night. A pamphlet listing area resources for students with learning disabilities was also developed. It is concluded that the parent support group gave parents a safe place to share their fears, hopes, frustrations, and intuitive knowledge with other parents with similar challenges. Appendices contain various practicum administration materials. (Contains 19 references.) (JDD)

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Development of a Parent Support Group for Parents Of Learning Disabled Students In a High School Setting

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by

Nancy Mari Purcell

Cluster XLIV

A Practicum I Report Presented to the Ed.D. Program in Child and Youth Studies in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of Doctor of Education

NOVA UNIVERSITY

1992

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PRACTICUM APPROVAL SHEET

This practicum took place as described.

Verifier: Janice G Dennis

Janice Dennis

Director of Special Services

Title

Ocean City, New Jersey

Address

June 20, 1992

Date

This practicum report was submitted by Nancy Mari Purcell under the direction of the adviser listed below. It was submitted to the Ed.D. Program in Child and Youth Studies and approved in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Education at Nova University.

Approved:

6-21-92

Date of Final Approval of Report

Mary W. Staggs, Ed.D.

Mary Staggs, Ed.D., Adviser

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1 Results of the Career/College Night Evaluation

Abstract

Development of a parent support group for parents of learning disabled students in a high school setting. Purcell, Nancy M., 1992: Practicum Report, Nova University, Ed.D. Program in Child and Youth Studies. Parent Groups/High School/Learning Disabilities Support/Parenting Special Education/Self-Help Group/Career Training/Daily Living Skills/Parent Education/Adolescent Rearing/Family Support/Parent-Adolescent Communication.

This practicum was designed to develop a parent support group for parents of learning disabled adolescents at a high school level. This was performed due to the fact that the traditional Parent/Teacher Association did not meet the unique needs of this population. Career opportunities, adolescent behavior and post-secondary academic settings were issues which were explored with parents, professionals and learning disabled students.

The writer administered a questionnaire; formed volunteer parent committees; obtained two guest speakers; held three formal meetings; obtained 28 college and career presenters; wrote a variety of correspondence before and after each meeting; held informal brainstorming meetings with parents; developed an evaluation form, a flyer, and brochure; distributed handouts at each meeting and publicized the parent support group on radio and in the newspaper.

The results indicated that the development of a parent support group enabled the parents to have a safe place to share their fears, hopes, and frustrations with other parents with similar challenges. Parents also gained knowledge from the speakers and were more optimistic concerning the future of their learning disabled young adult. By having a major part in the initial planning, the parents were vested in the group and trust was initiated between the professionals and the parents.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Description of Community

The school district in which the writer is employed is located in a seashore resort community approximately six miles in length which is dependent upon summer tourism to survive financially. Founded in the late nineteenth century as a Methodist summer retreat, vestiges of that heritage still remain. This community vigorously maintains a strong family orientation and calls itself proudly "The World's Greatest Family Resort."

The winter and year-round population of this community is approximately 17,000. However, from the end of May through the first week in September, this population expands to 100,000 visitors and residents. During the summer months, resort-type businesses provide many jobs on a seasonal basis to the young and old. Major employment opportunities year-round are limited to

utility companies, the casino industry, real estate, construction, retailing and insufficient professional possibilities. With the departure of summer visitors and their rental income, many community property owners attempt to rent their homes at cheaper winter rates. These circumstances produce an influx of students in mid October to an exit at the end of May, representing 24 percent of the high school student body in which the writer is employed.

The school district in this seaside community consists of a primary school (kindergarten through third grades), an intermediate school (fourth through eighth grades), and high school (ninth through twelfth grades). A trailer is necessary for the Special Services Department next to the primary site due to overcrowded conditions in the primary school. In addition, the superintendent, board of education, and Thorough and Efficient (T&E) offices are located in a suite of rooms in a local bank building. This vast network of educational facilities places an enormous financial burden on the entire seaside community.

Writer's Work Setting and Role

The high school in which this practicum took place has a population of approximately 1,200 students. The ethnic composition of the high school student body is 91 percent white, 6.4 percent black, 1.3 percent Asian, .8 percent Hispanic, and a small mix of other minorities. More than half of the student population in grades nine through twelve is comprised from three neighboring districts. In addition to the traditional educational services at the high school site, students also attend a vocational school twenty-five miles away from the high school. These students attend vocational school on a shared time program. Half the students' day is spent on academic endeavors at the high school, and the other half of the day is spent on vocational training. The high school also includes advanced placement programs, gifted and talented programs, basic skills and special education services.

In grades nine through twelve, the goal is to meet the needs of two basic types of pupils: those interested in high school as preparation for further education, and those for whom high school is the final educational experience. Common to both of these groups

are certain basic subjects required of all students regardless of their goals.

In order to graduate from the writer's high school, a student must accumulate 110 credits, achieve satisfactory scores on the State Basic Skills, the High School Proficiency Test, and proficiencies in mathematics, science, English and social studies.

At the writer's high school, the population of special education students is 110. The standard state and local graduation requirements may be waived for the special education population through their Individual Educational Plan (IEP).

Special education students at the writer's high school may have replacement services of individual subjects in the Learning Resource Center (LRC). They may also experience support, supplemental or in-class support in order to reach their full potential. At the writer's high school setting, there are no self-contained classes. Students in need of intense special needs are currently being provided with an out-of-district program in an accredited special school.

The staff of the high school consists of 3 administrators, 104 teachers, 8 paraprofessionals, 5 clerical personnel, 8 food service people, and 5

custodial and maintenance workers. These individuals are represented by three different unions and professional organizations.

All instructional staff are required to hold a bachelor's degree and a valid state teaching certificate. The average teaching experience is 17 years. Fifty-three percent (53%) of the teachers have a bachelor's degree, forty-two percent (42%) a master's degree and two percent(2%) have doctorates.

The general socioeconomic status of the parents of the students in the high school is middle class with a balance between upper and lower classes. Various students come from homes assessed at $400,000 while others dwell in government supported housing projects. Parents' employment range from professionals, blue collar workers and others on welfare assistance.

Currently, the writer holds a bachelor's degree in special education and a master of education as a Learning Disabilities Teacher/Consultant (LDT/C). For over fifteen years, the writer has been involved in the education of the special education children and young adults, first as a teacher and presently as a Learning Disabilities Specialist. During this time, the writer has constantly been active in various national

crganizations which concentrate their efforts on the issues of the special education population.

The writer frequently speaks at local parent groups or workshops on various aspects of learning disabilities. The writer increases her professional development by attending or sending for pertinent information from workshops, inservices or seminars. This is also encouraged by the writer's school district.

The writer's responsibilities as a Learning Disabilities Teacher/Consultant at the high school setting include observations of students and programs, developing intervention strategies, consultation with administration, teachers, parents and students, performing formal and informal educational evaluations, collaborating with the guidance personnel in developing schedules, as well as intervening in discipline and absenteeism problems. The writer frequently offers academic and emotional guidance to students as well as parents of learning disabled students and the regular student body.

The writer is respected in her position as a Learning Disabilities Teacher/Consultant and seen as one who strives to prepare disabled students for a successful transition from school to work or higher education.

CHAPTER II

STUDY OF THE PROBLEM

Problem Description

Historically, at the writer's work site there was no organized group where parents of adolescents and young adults classified as disabled could share information as well as support and encourage each other with the guidance and coordination of school personnel. At the writer's high school, the traditional Parent-Teacher Association (PTA) is an intricate component for communication between teachers and parents. However, these meetings are held only a few times a year for ten to fifteen minutes per parent conference and focus essentially on the academic and behavioral aspects of the young adult. Over the last three years, the writer has received numerous phone calls from parents of disabled young adolescents as well as personal conferences requiring indepth information on a magnitude of issues beyond academic and behavior concerns. Career

opportunities, post secondary vocations, social skills, life skills, sexual information, peer relationships and higher educational opportunities are but a few matters which parents of disabled adolescents must handle in unique fashion as compared to the general population. The transition into young adulthood creates stress and anxiety in all families. However, parents of disabled young adults need an organized group to suggest ways to acquire a job coach, receive the Standardized Achievement Test (SAT) untimed, enhance social skills in order for the young adult to function in the world of work, and explore how to talk about sexual concerns with their young adult, to mention but a few pertinent topics. The steps other parents took to overcome difficulties should be shared and in this way everyone would benefit: parents, teachers, and the young adult.

In the writer's opinion, the main reason there was not a specific support group for parents of disabled young adults was due to the fact that the professionals were familiar with the traditional PTA system, and no one had initiated an addition or a change to include a different method. Another cause for the complacency was the knowledge that professionals as well as parents are frequently working two jobs, and no one felt they had

time to organize the group, much less attend (Professionals and Parents as Advocates, Summer Institute, 1991). Lastly, in some instances, there was a suspicion among the teachers that if parents organized, they may then create problems due to administrative matters which they didn't understand. As the teachers were suspicious, so some parents were fatalistic and felt no matter what they did, things would not change.

Briefly stated, the problem in the writer's work site was a lack of a parent support group with professional assistance for parents of the disabled high school population. As a result of this vacuum, families floundered for answers and this stimulated frustration and a sense of further isolation for the family and the disabled young adolescent and young adults.

Problem Documentation

In September 1989, the writer began working in a high school setting as an LDT/C. Over the last three years, it had become apparent through numerous telephone conversations and personal interviews with parents of disabled youngsters that they were very concerned about their youngsters with the same zeal as parents of

disabled children in the lower grades. However, the writer's school district was similar to many other high school settings in that the emphasis was traditionally placed on early intervention for students ages two to five and parent involvement in grades one through eight. As the young adult reached high school, the parental involvement was limited to a few parent/teacher conferences and an IEP meeting, but beyond these, individuals with problems outside the academic and behavioral domains had to seek the assistance of Child Study Team (CST) members on an "as needed" basis. Interviews with parents of special education adolescents also made it crystal clear that many parents recognize developmental areas of delay in their children when they are young, but do not realize that adolescence is yet another developmental stage which all youngsters follow whether disabled or not. This presented confusion in parents as to whether new unexplained behaviors were due to the disability or purely adolescent conflicts between parents and teens.

In October 1990, the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) was signed by President Bush which mandated the cooperation of interagencies to work with secondary schools to prepare a viable "transition plan"

to insure a continuum of services if necessary after the disabled youngster exits from school. This "transition plan" has forced schools, agencies and parents to sit down and map out strategies indicating who is responsible for implementing various sections of the "transitional plan." By planning ahead in a systematic manner, the future of the disabled young adult should be less frightening and uncertain (Turnbull and Turnbull, 1986). If these parents were given the security of a safe place, such as a parent support group, to investigate various options, this transition for their youngsters would not be made in isolation but would be created in an atmosphere of reassurance as informed parents.

In anticipation of initiating this first practicum during the winter and spring of 1991, the writer networked with the CSTs from surrounding districts to investigate the existence of a parent support group in their high schools. Of the eight district high schools which the writer actually spoke with, only one school had such a group, and in this group there was no coordinator from the CST or school faculty involved. Any member of the school family was welcome, but the parent group was essentially operated by parents. The

writer then contacted the president of the parent group and was informed that the group was in its embryonic stage. However, the parents felt positive concerning the support, accessibility of speakers and school involvement.

The other seven districts' Child Study Teams were in agreement that a parent support group would be an asset to the current program but were not willing to perform the ground work necessary to implement such a project. Some professionals also cautioned the writer as to the expected involvement of secondary school parents. According to Kroth (1985) only an estimated 20 percent or so of the total parent population is able to participate in any parent group. The writer was appreciative of this honest feedback as she now would intervene with various techniques to entice the parents to attend the group. Anticipation and planning for any difficulties helped ensure the success of the parent support group.

Finally, in May 1991, the writer developed and mailed to fifty parents of disabled youths a questionnaire to actually survey the need for a parent support group at the writer's work site (see Appendices A and B). These fifty parents were chosen due to the fact

that the writer personally serviced these youngsters on her caseload and had frequent contact with these parents. The results indicated an overwhelming support for the project with interests noted in the areas of study skills, post-secondary technical schools, Child Study Team issues, and adolescent development. From the writer's personal conversation with parents of disabled youngsters, concerns were more focused on issues after graduation from high school. Issues such as career training, employment and college opportunities were areas of deep concern to these parents.

The writer also distributed another questionnaire to her faculty members and mailed the same questionnaire to three area school districts' CSTs to obtain their views on the need for such a group and their areas of interest (see Appendices C and D). As with the parent questionnaire, the support was positive, with many noteworthy comments and suggestions. Professionals felt that many times parents of adolescents were overwhelmed by their responsibility and were not prepared to provide the support needed for these difficult times. Some professionals stated the group should be opened to the entire high school population and not segregated to the parents of disabled youth. All confirmed the fact that

the traditional PTA was not sufficient for parents of disabled young adults. Suggestions were made for the length of time and format of the meetings. Various members of the faculty volunteered to speak on selected topics for the parent support group.

Combining the personal contact with parents of disabled young adults which indicated the intense yearning these parents have for information and guidance with the results from the parent and professional questionnaire, the outcome was overwhelming in favor of launching ahead with the inception of a parent support group. A parent support group would also enhance the Individual Transitional Plan (ITP) mandated by the IDEA issued in 1991 by President Bush.

With the confirmation of this inadequacy at the writer's high school, the stage was set to permit the work to commence to organize a parent support group for parents of disabled young adults.

Causative Analysis

At the writer's work site there was no organized group where parents of adolescents and young adults classified as disabled could meet and share ideas and concerns as well as gain information pertinent to their

needs. One of the main reasons for this situation was the fact that professionals and parents were familiar with the traditional PTA system and neither had initiated a change or alternative method. However, this initial state of affairs was also produced by an unconscious ignorance concerning the specific needs of the disabled youths and their families by professionals. As Kroth (1985) stated, teachers may never have a handicapped child, but they can still develop a sensitivity for the interaction and dynamics of the family in dealing with the handicapped youngster. Teachers may instruct these young adults in academic proficiencies for five hours a day but each human being is composed of much more than a brain to regurgitate information. We are all emotional, physical, spiritual, and intellectual human creatures with joys, fears, and desires. The families of disabled young adults frequently felt isolated, frustrated, and in a state of despair because they had no one who they could turn to to inquire about very personal aspects of their disabled young adult. Teachers and professionals frequently forgot that when the disabled youth was promoted from their grade, he moved on and their responsibility ended, but for the parents, the job is 24 hours every day, and

the problems were more intense with adolescents than with the younger child.

As the review of the needs assessment demonstrated, once the facts were disclosed, both parents and professionals were ready to, at the very least, attempt to develop a parent support group. The traditional Parent-Teacher Association may be effective for the majority, but for a smaller group of young adults and their families, their future dreams were difficult to attain due to an enormous lack of parental support, professional expertise, and community awareness.

A second cause of the lack of a parent support group for parents of disabled youths was the fact that due to the economic situation, the current trend is for both parents to be working, as well as the fact that some adults are holding down two jobs. This work frenzy permits little time for parents or professionals to organize or attend a parent support group. Even though their intentions may be sincere, there is only so much energy one has to devote to extra activities. However, the school professionals must take the initiative to develop honest communication and assist parents to establish time and invest in their youngster's education and future. The writer found that parents of disabled

adolescents were more accepting and eager to attend a parent support group due to the fact they felt a collaborative spirit ensuing which produced a ray of hope for themselves and their young adults.

The writer attempted to remedy the time factor by holding meetings at various times of the day and not always at the school facility. Some meetings were held in late morning, others in the afternoon hours, and three meetings in the evening. This schedule permitted more flexibility within families and demonstrated the writer's sincere effort to improve conditions for the disabled youngsters.

Secondly, parents with school guidance worked in unison to locate speakers who offered suggestions to enhance the life of the disabled young adult. The speaker was chosen for his/her relevance to the subjects and not simply designated by some school official, the parents therefore felt a vested interest and wanted to attend.

Thirdly, childcare turned out not to be a cause for parents not to attend. However, in the writer's work site, a childcare course is taught through basic book knowledge. These young adults were ready to volunteer their time if necessary to assist the parents. Another

approach to childcare was the use of senior citizens from area church groups. Many of the senior citizens are well and capable and would enjoy the company of a child for a short time. However, the use of senior citizens was not necessary for the three meetings held this year.

Attendance was difficult, but the writer believed with a little imagination and perseverance, obstacles over time could be eliminated.

Two additional causes for the lack of a parent support group for parents of disabled students in the writer's work place were the belief by some professionals that if organized, the parents would find issue with policies and procedures due to administrative directives and create problems for administrators and teachers. Secondly, some parents had a fatalistic assumption as to the effectiveness of parent-teacher communication.

In reality, it was found that if parents were addressed as equals as in a partnership and a climate of openness was created, the parents were more supportive of school administrators and staff. The major theme of a parent support group as presented by Florence Stewart Poyadue, Executive Director of Santa Clara County

Parents Helping Parents, should be the successful care and education of children. The main barriers to reaching these goals are all too often reflected in myths that people have about each other and the fragile egos of insecure individuals (Poyadue, 1990). Parents don't communicate openly and honestly for fear of retaliation by those in charge of their youngster. Professionals fear the admonishment of colleagues and parents if they admit they are not infallible.

By creating a parent support group, parents of disabled young adults and any school personnel did in a non-threatening environment develop mutual respect for each other. Each group began to value the other's point of view and develop a consensus of solutions rather than attempting to solve problems in isolation. By sharing the burden of preparing disabled adolescents for the real world of life with others, parents became more optimistic concerning their youngsters' future.

Relationship of the Problem to the Literature

Historically, parent organizations have played an important role in shaping the lives of children with disabilities and their families. Groups such as the National Society for Autistic Children, the National

Association for Down Syndrome and the Learning Disabilities Associations are but a few groups which offer parents support, information on education, social events, employment placement and post-secondary opportunities for the growth and success of the disabled populations. Their influence upon governmental legislation can never be overlooked (Turnbull and Turnbull, 1986).

However, these specific parent support groups tend to be centrally located and members participate from all various grade levels and schools in the area. There is little connection with the home school (Kroth, 1985).

Epstein (1991) and Solomon (1991) have reviewed various initiative programs for participation in America 2000 and concluded that the potentially effective programs are those which emphasize a local family/school partnership.

Unfortunately, emphasis has been appropriated on early intervention and early childhood programs for the disabled child (Coletta, 1977; Gelfer, 1991; and Kroth, 1985). As the disabled youngster enters middle school and high school, he and his family must resort to the traditional PTA to acquire academic and behavioral information concerning the young adult.

The young adult's educational experiences neither begin nor end in the confines of the school day. Before this young adult entered any classroom, the most important people in his life were his parents. Parents therefore are an important source of information concerning this individual. Essentially, in order to educate the complete young adult, it is imperative that parent/school involvement be reciprocal.

According to Wolf (1989), "Parents are typically eager to gain information regarding their child's performance" (p. 28). Lindle (1989) and Leuder (1989) found that parents preferred to be included in the dialogue concerning their child's education and appreciated school systems which permitted them equal partnership in the educational process. All parents would prefer more than a ten to fifteen minute parent-teacher conference. They dislike the formality, lack of privacy and patronizing they frequently encounter at traditional parent-teacher association conferences (Lindle, 1989). The traditional PTA conferences held but a few times a year focus on academic and behavioral progress which leaves a void for the parents/guardians of disabled young adults.

Parents of disabled young adults, in a national study, reported that the life cycle stages of adolescence and the transition into young adulthood created a very real sense of stress and anxiety in the family structure (Turnbull & Turnbull, 1986). These parents are yearning for more information and guidance.

Parents of disabled young adolescents and young adults require indepth information on a magnitude of issues. Career opportunities, post-secondary vocations, social skills, life skills, sexual information, peer relationships and higher educational opportunities are but a few matters which parents of disabled adolescents must handle in unique fashion as compared to the general population.

Currently, there is no parent support group for parents of disabled young adults. As a result, the writer frequently offers suggestions to individual parents of disabled young adults which would also benefit many other families in similar situations.

A parent support group, especially at the high school level, would assist parents to realize they are not the only parents with a specific problem. Parents would be able to share their emotions, both negative and positive, with people who are going through similar experiences. Parents

could offer solutions from a credible position and other parents may be more willing to attempt a particular action (Kroth, 1985). Additionally, in a group structure, the writer, as a LDT/C, could reach more individuals in a group support situation than spending an inordinate amount of time offering recommendations to a duplicate problem of several individual parents. However, the writer is sensitive enough to the feelings of parents of disabled adolescents to know some parents are more comfortable and confident in a one-to-one setting. Some issues cannot be resolved in a group situation. Some parents need one-to-one contact with a professional to resolve a particular problem (Kroth, 1985).

With the advent of new legislation and the mandate to develop parenting and family resource programs, it would appear a prudent move to once again connect the school, parents and community resources to ensure the most productive future for all disabled children but in particular for young adolescents as they make the transition from school to young adulthood. This type of parent support group has the potential to be the catalyst to initiate understanding, career opportunities, community activities and renewed commitment to community-based partnerships, bringing about a more auspicious outlook for all disabled people.

CHAPTER III

ANTICIPATED OUTCOMES AND EVALUATION INSTRUMENTS

Goals and Expectations

The goal of this practicum was to organize a parent support group at the writer's work site to meet the needs of parents of disabled adolescents and young adults who are preparing to make the transition from school to work or post-secondary education.

One objective was the sharing of pertinent information as gathered through various committees and speakers to enhance the knowledge of parents of learning disabled adolescents.

A second objective was to create a booklet for parents, listing local agencies, physicians, and other important groups significant to the care of learning disabled adolescents. This objective was projected for completion within one year.

Expected Outcomes

Established parent groups such as the Association for Retarded Citizens and the Learning Disabilities Association have demonstrated that parent support and initiative can produce positive results for the disabled children (Turnbull and Turnbull, 1986).

The more positive the interaction between parents and professionals the more likely they will work in the best interest for the disabled child (Kroth, 1985). Programs such as the Parents as Partners in Learning Act (S.546) and Child Welfare and Prevention Services (S.4) are being encouraged in legislature (Child Welfare League of America, February 1991).

During the period of twelve weeks, the major change expected was the inception of a parent support group for parents of disabled young adults in the writer's work place where they could come and share fears, joys, concerns and gain information in a safe environment of acceptance and understanding. In addition, it was hoped that a bond would be established between professionals and parents where there was a sense of respect, understanding, honesty and open communication for the ultimate good of the disabled population.

In order to meet the objective of sharing information with parents, it was anticipated that over the twelve-week period, various committees would be established. The following committees were formed.

1. Communication Committee--To assist the writer in mailing out notices of pertinent workshops, legal issues which affect disabled young adults, placing notices of meetings in the newspaper, and telephoning parents to remind them of upcoming events.

2. College and Trade School Committee--This committee would investigate colleges and trade schools with services for the learning disabled student. The committee would send for information to be used in the selection for future visitations.

3. Speakers Committee--This committee, with the assistance of the writer, would explore possible speakers from the Division of Vocational Rehabilitation (DVR), CST members, employers, and any other person or organization which would facilitate in the successful transition of the learning disabled young adult from school to work or post-secondary education. A third expected goal was that of developing an information booklet for parents of learning disabled young adults.

This goal was on-going, actually evolving as a by-product of the parent support group.

Measurement of Outcome

The major goal of developing a parent support group for parents of learning disabled students was measured by the actual attendance at each meeting. In order to generate interest, the writer composed a letter of introduction with two handouts relevant to parents of learning disabled youngsters for each meeting (see Appendices E and F). The Communications Committee mailed this correspondence to 110 families of learning disabled students in the writer's high school and in addition telephoned the same families a few days before the meeting, reminding them of the meeting.

An announcement of the meetings was also placed in each professional's mailbox at the writer's work site. This was done in an effort to promote congeniality between the parent support group and the professionals at the writer's work site.

For the third meeting, which was a career/college night, intense radio and newspaper articles were attempted to entice even more parents and professionals to attend. The Communications Committee, acting on the recommendation of the writer, extended the invitation to

career/college night to include surrounding schools in two counties, focusing on parents and learning disabled youngsters from seventh grade to twelfth grade.

This last technique was by far the most effective in arousing interest and eliciting attendance by parents and learning disabled adolescents.

After each formal parent support group meeting, an evaluation form was filled out in order that the writer have constructive criticism and immediate feedback on the events of that evening (see Appendices G and H).

An essential component for the success of the parent support group was the voluntary participation by parents and professionals serving on various committees. These committees were evaluated by their participation over the three-months period and the ability to perform their duties in a proficient manner. The writer was pleasantly surprised by the enthusiasm and cooperation of the parents. The writer developed a Communication/Telephone Committee, Speaker Committee and College and Trade School Committee with a core of sixteen volunteer parents of learning disabled students. At each brainstorming meeting, there was never less than five committee members in attendance. Frequently, the same parents volunteered for two committees and worked

diligently to make each parent support group meeting successful.

A final objective of the writer's practicum was the formation of a booklet listing professionals or agencies who would be willing to work with the parents of learning disabled youngsters as well as the young adult. This objective would extend over a year's time; therefore, only a partial evaluation can be presently deemed. However, a limited listing of agencies has been established and a representative from the DVR has begun to interview and evaluate the 11th and 12th grades to assist these students in acquiring employment. This incomplete listing and recommendations from the representative from DVR were shared with parents during the IEP meetings.

CHAPTER IV

SOLUTION STRATEGY

Discussion and Evaluation of Solutions

Parents of adolescent disabled youngsters require advice on many critical issues, not only academic or behavioral problems. Parents of high school disabled youngsters have, for the most part, accepted their youngsters' disability but feel unsure of their abilities to deal with these young adult dilemmas.

A synopsis of the literature revealed that positive results were produced through structured parent support groups. Parental involvement fosters academic achievement, builds self-esteem in youngsters and helps motivate youngsters to reach their potential (Coletta, 1977; Steward, 1986; Gelfer, 1991; Solomon, 1991; Epstein, 1991). Turnbull and Turnbull (1986) emphasized the added burden which parents of disabled young adults face as their young adults make the transition from school to work or post-secondary education. The addition of the "transition plan" to the standard

Individual Education Plan through the IDEA of 1990, has mandated a collaborative effort between school, parents and community to more effectively prepare the young adult for society. According to organized parent groups such as Parent-to-Parent or Parents-Helping-Parents:

> Families in untypical situations may find traditional sources of help unable to understand their particular needs and unable to help them problem-solve. These groups can provide the opportunity for families to come together to create a new belief in themselves, in their ability to live this new life, and to continue seeking solutions to on-going difficulties effectively and competently. (National Institute on Disability and Rehabilitation Research, 1991, p. 21).

The emphasis on the traditional PTA has been on early intervention in grades 1 through 6; however, Brandt (1989) found that parents at all grade levels want to stay informed and involved. These parents will attend when they experience a sense of empowerment and hope in the lives of their young adults (Wikelund, 1990).

Recognizing the promising results from other parent groups as well as the new laws mandating productive involvement between the school and parents, the writer developed a parent support group for parents of learning disabled young adults. Emphasis was placed on such issues as vocational developmental, post-secondary education, social skills, and study skills as identified

through the parent questionnaire. Volunteer committees were developed to investigate various issues and report findings to the parent group.

The writer realized that this practicum was to be time consuming, especially in the initial stages, but also felt the final results would far exceed any difficulties. The writer perceived a true sense of accomplishment due to the fact that these parents as a group gained support and information which diminished their sense of isolation and created more auspicious possibilities for their learning disabled young adult.

Description of Selected Solutions

Historically at the writer's worksite there was no organized group where parents of adolescents and young adults classified as handicapped could gain information and support with the guidance/coordination of school personnel. The traditional PTA conferences held but a few times a year focus on academic and behavioral issues which leaves a void for parents/guardians of special education young adults. Parents of disabled young adults in a national study reported that the life cycle stages of adolescence and the transition into young adulthood created a very real sense of stress and

anxiety in the family structure (Turnbull and Turnbull, 1986).

A questionnaire disseminated to parents of disabled adolescents indicated that they require in-depth information on career opportunities, post-secondary vocations, social skills, study skills, sexual information, and peer relationships. Each adolescent must face these issues but for the disabled young adult and his family, some of these concerns are challenging enough to require outside expertise and additional comradeship from others in similar family lifestyles.

A questionnaire was distributed to professionals, and again support for a parent support group was overwhelmingly positive. Personal interviews with parents of special education adolescents by the writer indicated that many parents lacked a significant understanding of the developmental stages of adolescence, and this magnified the confusion when dealing with a disabled young adult.

On a much broader prospective, the enactment of the IDEA in October 1990 by President Bush mandated the cooperation of interagencies, parents, schools and community to systematically plan for the future of the disabled youth. By establishing a parent support group

for parents of disabled youths, this implementation was to be coordinated and parents would then feel less isolated and uncertain concerning the future success of their young adult.

The writer was prepared to establish a parent support group for parents of disabled adolescents at her worksite. She was also prepared to act as a facilitator, assisting the various committees until they felt comfortable with their tasks.

The writer carefully monitored the progress of each committee and ensured that time lines were met and the proper number of volunteers were secured.

The writer in addition was responsible to compose correspondence or evaluation handouts necessary for the committees. The writer wrote personal thank-you notes to all speakers and parent volunteers. This serves a two-fold purpose: the sense of accomplishment and effort is recognized, and in addition, hopefully these volunteers will return next school year and bring a friend to continue this endeavor.

Report of Action Taken

Before the actual implementation, informal preliminary meetings were held with several parents who have learning disabled adolescents in the writer's high

school. These parents and the writer selected committees which were essential to the function of the parent support group. The Communication Committee, Speaker Committee, College and Trade School Committee, and Information Booklet Committee were the four primary committees established. These parents and the writer then telephoned fifty other parents who had answered the parent questionnaire the previous year concerning the need for a parent support group. Sixteen additional parents were acquired via this telephone communication. Each parent was given a choice of which committee he or she would like to volunteer to work on. Some parents committed to more than one committee. The writer then met at regular intervals to brainstorm necessary tasks to achieve effective results to enhance the parent support group. Meetings were held in the afternoon after school, evening, and one early before school started.

The writer first met with the Speakers Committee to select a speaker for the first meeting and to set a date and time. Before the committee members began the search for a speaker, the writer cleared the date and time with the building custodian. The search encompassed psychologists, learning disability specialists,

neurologist to speak on Attention Deficit Disorder (ADD), nutritionist, guidance counselors, vocational trainers, as well as law enforcement officers. The committee and the writer telephoned area professionals to request their attendance at the first parent support meeting. Due to the haste with which the committee and writer desired to have this first meeting, many potential speakers were already engaged. An additional detriment was the lack of finances to reimburse the speaker for his time. Finally, a district psychologist agreed to speak to the parents concerning adolescent development and the significance to learning disabled youngsters.

Subsequent meetings enabled the committee to locate a representative from the DVR who spoke on the vocational aspect of the learning disabled population.

Once the speakers were attained, the writer turned her attention to meetings with the Communication Committee. Their task was to send out letters composed by the writer to all of the families of learning disabled youngsters in the high school. In addition, follow-up telephone calls were made to entice parents to attend. One hundred and six calls were made. Thirty families could not be reached, twenty-seven families

were unable to come, twenty-nine families had recording machines and a message was left, and twenty families were personally talked to by the writer or a member of the committee. This committee also developed an agenda for each meeting. The Communication Committee also copied pertinent information to the speaker's topic or issues of importance to the learning disabled young adult and his family. These handouts were placed on a table for parents to take the night of the parent support meeting. All the volunteer parents and writer either baked cookies or purchased paper goods, sugar, cream, and coffee and set up a decorative refreshment area to welcome the new members of the parent support group. Chairs were arranged in a circle in order that people could identify a face with a name and become friendly with other parents and professionals.

At each parent support group meeting, a short introduction concerning the speaker was made by the writer and an acknowledgment of the tedious work made by the volunteer parents to make this parent support group a success. Time was always permitted for questions and answers by the speaker; however, an earnest effort was made to limit meetings to an hour and a half. The writer consistently encouraged new parents to become

involved, and any concerns they had were noted and addressed at subsequent brainstorming meetings at a later date.

Evaluations were distributed following the meeting (see Appendices G and H), and these were used in an effort to improve the effectiveness of the parent support group for future meetings. The volunteer parents, writer, and her professional co-worker were diligent in leaving the meeting room in impeccable order so as not to cause the custodians any unnecessary labor on our account. This was most appreciated by them, and as a result we were always granted requests to rearrange furniture or decorate as we saw appropriate.

The writer was also conscientious concerning sending prompt thank-you notes to the speakers, co-worker, parents and custodial staff (see Appendix I).

Once the parent support group meeting dates and speakers were set in motion, the writer met with the College/Trade School Committee to discuss strategies for visiting various post-secondary institutions. This was where the writer was faced with a dilemma. The length of the practicum was so short in duration that a convenient time and date to visit these institutions became impossible. It was decided that the committee

would ask agencies, trade schools, educational institutions, and area businesses to speak with learning disabled youngsters and their parents about post-secondary opportunities. A Career/College Night would be held at the writer's work site and be opened to two counties instead of the previous meetings which were only attended by the local high school parents of learning disabled students. It was further decided that in order to motivate learning disabled youngsters to set realistic goals, this Career/College Night would encompass parents and learning disabled youngsters from grades seven through twelve.

At this initial proposal stage, the College/Vocational School Committee nor the writer had any idea how much time and coordination would be necessary to insure a successful event. The writer did not aim for a specific number of representatives knowing the time frame was limited but instead vowed to make this initial Career/College Night focus on a variety of opportunities for the learning disabled young adult.

The committee and the writer solicited the assistance of the Communications Committee in mailing letters to prospective representatives as well as telephoning agencies. A continual list of agencies was

placed on the computer as an initial beginning for an information booklet. Colleges and vocational schools were selected from Technical, Trade and Business School Data Handbook (Otaguro, 1991-93), College Guide for Students with Learning Disabilities (Scolfani, 1990-91), and Director of College Facilities and Services for the Disabled (Thomas, 1986). In addition, the local telephone directories were utilized to stimulate interest from local trade schools or apprentice-type environments. A total of 78 letters were mailed (see Appendix J). Most of the institutions which did not send a representative provided the writer with brochures as well as letters describing their Special Needs Services. This information was made available to parents on Career/College Night at a "freebie" table.

When the final list of actual representatives from various colleges and agencies was compiled, signs were made on the computer and then placed on a table for each representative. One hundred questionnaires were copied and the cafeteria tables were rearranged to accommodate the twenty-eight representatives, leaving aisles for the parents and youngsters to walk through and speak with the representative. A refreshment table was made available with an additional table to sit and relax and

chat with new-found friends. At each door, a member of the writer's Child Study Team was stationed to answer questions, hand out a brochure, have parents sign-in, and retrieve the questionnaires as the people left the Career/College Night. The writer acted as a hostess, making sure representatives, parents and learning disabled youngsters felt comfortable and benefited from the wealth of knowledge at their fingertips. Verbal suggestions and comments were mentally noted by the writer. The writer obtained the name of each representative present so as to be able to write a thank-you to them as well as their superior (see Appendix K).

One of the difficulties which became apparent on Career/College Night was the size of our cafeteria. Since the writer had no idea how many people would attend, this arrangement from past attendance seemed more than appropriate. However, by opening up this up to two counties, the attendance expanded to over two hundred people. Space became a little crowded, but the writer was delighted with the turn-out.

At the completion of each parent support meeting as well as Career/College Night, an overview meeting was held with the committees and writer to review the

evaluations filled out by the participants and also examine the positives and negatives the group discovered. Tabulations of attendance and suggestions were recorded in an effort to improve the substance of the meetings as well as the attendance.

It was during this meeting that it was discovered that only two professionals from the writer's work site were in attendance. Also, the core of sixteen parents as volunteers remained constant with much overlap of interest in other committees as well as the original one they had committed to. The committee members and writer also discovered that the attendance at the initial meeting was twenty-two parents and one added professional. The topic was Adolescent Development, presented by the local school psychologist. At the second meeting, attendance decreased with fifteen parents and again one professional. The topic for this meeting was Learning Disabled Young Adult Employment and Training. The presenter was from a diagnostic training center, which is affiliated with DVR, and services all types of disabled people. The committee and writer hypothesized that many parents did not feel their youngster was handicapped to the degree that they required the assistance of this agency. In reality, the

evening was quite relevant to all individuals seeking employment.

At the last committee meeting, the writer and committee members decided to have one more parent support group meeting this year, inviting the parents of learning disabled youngsters currently in the writer's high school to join with parents of incoming freshmen for the school year 1992-1993. This meeting will attempt to accent the positive issue of the learning disabled youngsters and curtail misconceptions some parents have concerning the transition from elementary school to high school.

In addition, it was decided to assemble this summer and begin the search for speakers and investigate further career/college activities.

The many steps taken to implement the parent support group for parents of learning disabled adolescents required many time-consuming hours of labor in order to achieve success. If the reader is to duplicate this parent support group, one must be able to foresee obstacles, ignore the pessimism from some professionals and turn self-doubt and disappointment into creativity and energy to meet all challenges.

CHAPTER V

RESULTS, DISCUSSIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Results

At the writer's work site there was no organized group in which parents of adolescents and young adults classified as disabled could share information as well as support and encourage each other with the guidance and coordination of school personnel. The traditional PTA focuses essentially on the academic and behavioral aspects of the young adult. However, parents of disabled young adolescents and young adults require in-depth information on a magnitude of issues. Career opportunities, post-secondary vocations, social skills, life skills, sexual information, and peer relationships are but a few issues which parents of disabled adolescents must deal with in unique ways as compared to the general population.

In order to eradicate this vacuum and sense of isolation which the parents of disabled adolescents experience, the writer developed a parent support group

for parents of learning disabled adolescents. The writer implemented various committees involving the parents to enhance the parent support group and help parents feel vested in the group.

By developing this parent support group, parents were given a safe place to share their fears, hopes, frustrations and intuitive knowledge with other parents with similar challenges. In addition, guest speakers were present at each meeting, adding professional suggestions to these parents which stimulated hope for a more productive future for the learning disabled young adult.

Discussion

The major goal of this practicum was to develop a parent support group for parents of adolescents and young adults with learning disabilities and have two formal meetings over the three-month period. Success was measured by the attendance of at least 20 people. In reality, the writer with the assistance of the committees was able to hold three formal meetings. At the first meeting, the speaker was a local psychologist who spoke on adolescence and the significance this developmental stage has on the learning disabled

youngster and his family. This initial meeting was well attended with 22 parents and 1 professional.

The issue of employment was cited as an important concern by parents on a questionnaire distributed earlier in the year to parents of disabled high school young adults. Keeping this in mind, the Speaker Committee obtained a representative from the diagnostic training center, a division of DVR, who spoke on employment opportunities as well as some obstacles the learning disabled may experience in the world of work. At this second meeting, attendance declined to 15 parents and 1 professional from the writer's high school. The writer speculated that the parents had misconceptions concerning the type of students serviced by the diagnostic training center and felt their young adults were not in need of this service.

In an attempt to circumvent this misconception, a letter was later sent from the writer's school, introducing the representative from DVR and a description of her efforts to assist the learning disabled youngster to become better prepared for his entrance into the world upon his graduation. This letter was sent to parents of 11th and 12th graders only. Out of the 21 students contacted, 20 were

initially interviewed. Four youngsters were not interested after interviews, and the remaining 16 worked with the DVR representative and the writer in acquiring employment. Signed releases by parents for records to be reviewed were obtained by 9 students. At the end of this practicum, 2 LD youngsters were employed part-time as chamber maids, 1 was a preparation cook at a local restaurant, and 1 had acquired year-round employment after school at a local florist shop as an assistant.

In reality, the sparse attendance at the second meeting generated an acceleration of a program which had been talked about but never given much credence to in the writer's work site. In actuality, a limited participation at the second parent support group meeting produced a positive program in the writer's high school.

The third parent support group meeting was aimed at motivating and giving hope to the parents and learning disabled young adults toward future careers or post-secondary education. This time the Communication Committee and the writer exhausted several additional techniques in their efforts to publicize this Career/College Night. Press announcements were sent to the local radio stations and newspaper offices. The press release was printed one week before the

Career/College Night. Further, radio announcements were made three different times in the form of a brief description of the event by the radio personnel and a short comment by the writer, encouraging everyone to attend in order to gain pertinent information.

Due to the initial contact made to the local radio station, the radio announcer requested the writer to perform an interview on her show, "Rising to the Issues," which is a half-hour show on Sunday mornings. The interview was held on April 19, 1992, with the purpose of informing the general population of the abilities learning disabled young adults possess and to explain why the writer started a parent support group at her work site.

The second outcome of this practicum was the formation of parent volunteer committees to assist with the essentials of the parent support group. A core of 16 parents participated in the Communication/Telephone Committee, Speaker Committee, College and Trade School Committee, and Information Booklet Committee. From mailing letters, making telephone calls, selecting speakers, making baked goods, setting up tables, to encouraging the writer to continue when the details outnumbered the hours in a day, the volunteer parents

labored zealously to ensure the success of the parent support group.

The writer will continue the parent support group next year and will attempt to gain more volunteers in order that each committee is actually responsible for only one area of the parent support group and avoid the duplication of services which may be too fatiguing over an entire year.

The final outcome of this practicum was the compilation of a booklet containing agencies and professionals who would be of assistance to the parents of learning disabled young adults. Thus far, this committee has accumulated several agencies into a booklet which is given out, when appropriate, to parents at IEP meetings. Additions will be made over the next year with the anticipation of a formal booklet as a final product.

The implementation of a parent support group for parents of learning disabled students at a high school level engenders many more hindrances than if this practicum were attempted at a lower grade level. Professionals as well as parents have traveled many years with these young adults and as a result, oftentimes allow their feelings of pessimism and

hopelessness to overshadow the many gifts these learning disabled young people possess. Furthermore, parents are ignorant to the fact that new laws have been passed to ensure accessibility of learning disabled students to post-secondary schools, and in addition employment opportunities and reasonable accommodations have been generated through the advocacy of groups such as the Learning Disabilities Association (LDA). The parent support group permitted a friendly forum to explore the possibilities available to LD young adults and permit the youngster and parent to gain knowledge to prepare for the future with direction and an outlook of hope.

An essential piece to this practicum was the continuous review of the evaluations after each formal meeting, as well as our intuitive sense that certain elements would require revision. The evaluations from the first two parent support group meetings were very positive concerning the knowledge gained from the speaker and the length of time of each meeting. However, it was suggested that more time be given for parents to share concerns which were not relevant to the specific topic of the meeting.

At the Career/College Night, 100 evaluations were prepared and handed out and 55 were returned.

Unfortunately, the writer was not able to survey the entire group of over 200 people due to the unanticipated attendance and lack of evaluations. However, from the comments, the committee members and the writer were able to gain valuable information. The overwhelming impression was one of positiveness for the entire program.

Table 1

Result of the Career/College Night Evaluation

1. The information was helpful to you and your youngster.

Excellent	Average	Fair	Poor
43	11	1	0

2. Presenters were knowledgeable concerning the needs of the LD student.

Excellent	Average	Fair	Poor
38	15	1	0

3. Handouts were adequate.

Excellent	Average	Fair	Poor
44	9	2	0

4. This information will assist you and your student in future career planning.

Excellent	Average	Fair	Poor
40	8	2	0

In answering questions as to what could be done to improve the Career/College Night, several recommendations were suggested.

1. Use a larger facility.
2. More four-year colleges represented.
3. Central speaker for guidance.
4. Include representatives from law enforcement careers and accounting careers.

Topics which were listed as of interest for future parent support group meetings included financial aid, realistic goals for LD youngsters, and enhancing self-confidence in LD youngsters.

As the parents and LD young adults left the Career/College Night, the writer was touched by the excited conversations between parents and youngsters as they expounded on the various occupations which they had explored during the evening. Many parents gained confidence speaking to the various presenters that their youngster could indeed go on to higher education and be gainfully employed as an adult. The path may be slightly different, but the ultimate goal of self-fulfillment and career opportunities were feasible.

The writer was commended by the presenters for having a Career/College Night focused on learning

disabled youths and stated it had not been done in this area before and they would be eager to return next year. Many professionals from other districts who had accompanied young adults from their schools were amazed at the wealth of information available, the interest and mature questions generated from the students, as well as the concern and patience shown by the presenters as they conversed with parents and youngsters. Everyone involved expressed a sincere desire to have a repeat performance, and many professionals as well as parents offered to work on the College and Trade School Committee next year.

Recommendations

The writer has three recommendations for the reader when duplicating this practicum.

1. Stay focused and don't allow pessimistic comments to deter your creativity and optimism.

2. When planning for meetings, invite parents and professionals from other districts as well as the local population.

3. Lastly, involve the parents from the start and accept their ideas and comments with respect. They will then feel vested in the parent group.

Dissemination

This practicum has been disseminated in articles in the local newspapers and radio station. The writer was privileged to speak on a radio show, "Rising to the Issues," concerning the needs of the learning disabled and their families. This opportunity was a direct result of this practicum.

In the April 1992 issue of the "DVRS News," an article addressed the Career/College Night as a part of the on-going transition process for these youngsters.

Professionals, parents and students from surrounding districts as well as the writer's own high school have called to ask when the parent group will meet again. Those professionals who were once skeptical are now inquiring as to how to start a parent support group in their school or join the writer's group.

No words could ever express the satisfaction the writer received from developing this parent support group. Too often, professionals are confronted with a massive amount of necessary paper work and lose touch with what is really important--the youngsters and the families we serve. This practicum has ignited the fire in the writer to continue "beating to a different drummer" and reach out to the future generations to make

a decided difference in their lives. By presenting options and opportunities, the writer supplies the hope needed to generate confidence to go the extra mile in these youngsters and realize their dreams.

It is the writer's hope that through her leadership role in implementing this practicum, parents and professionals will realize what powerful people they are in the learning disabled young adult's life. Working together, we can use this power to enhance the productivity and self-image of the learning disabled young adult as he progresses into adulthood.

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APPENDIX A

PARENT LETTER

APPENDIX A

June 26, 1991

Dear Parent/Guardian:

Enclosed please find a parent questionnaire concerning formation of a parent support group for learning disabled youngsters at the high school.

Please take a few moments to complete this questionnaire as your input is very important to me to insure a successful beginning. It is my intention to have our first meeting some time in late September 1991, and consideration of your suggestions before that time will be helpful. Please feel free to write comments or suggestions at the bottom of this questionnaire.

Thank you, and I am looking forward to hearing from you. Enclosed is a self-addressed envelope for your convenience.

Respectfully,

_____

NP/b
encls.

APPENDIX B

PARENT QUESTIONNAIRE

APPENDIX B

Parent Questionnaire

Needs assessment for parent support group

1. Do you think a parent support group would be helpful to you concerning issues with your youngster?

   Yes _____ No _____

2. Would you be willing to participate in such a support group once a month?

   Yes _____ No _____

3. Is there a morning, afternoon, or evening time convenient for you? Please circle the appropriate response.

   What day of the week is best?

4. What areas would you be interested in exploring?

   _____ Workshops
   _____ College visitations
   _____ Study skills
   _____ Social skills
   _____ Job share
   _____ View literature on techniques to assist learning disabled teens
   _____ Post-secondary technical schools
   _____ Outside agencies to assist learning disabled youngsters
   _____ Child Study Team issues
   _____ Adolescent development
   _____ Behavior issues
   _____ Other_____

5. If you plan to attend, do you need childcare?

   Yes _____ No _____

Thank you for responding to this questionnaire. Your input is valued and will be considered when the parent support group is implemented.

* 50 questionnaires distributed
  25 returned

APPENDIX C

PROFESSIONAL LETTER

APPENDIX C

June 6, 1991

Dear Fellow Professionals:

Enclosed please find a Professional Questionnaire concerning the formation of a parent support group for parents of learning disabled youngsters at the high school.

Please take a few minutes to complete this questionnaire, as your input is essential to the success of this organization. It is my intention to implement this parent support group in the fall of the 1991-1992 school year. Please feel free to write comments or suggestions at the bottom of this questionnaire. Your attendance and presentation in areas of your expertise would enhance the effectiveness of this group.

Thank you for your continued support.

Respectfully,

_____

APPENDIX D

PROFESSIONAL QUESTIONNAIRE

APPENDIX D

Professional Questionnaire

Needs Assessment for parent support group

1. Do you feel that a Parent Support Group for the parents of the special education population is necessary?

   Yes _____ No _____

2. Would you be willing to participate either as a presenter or as a member?

   Yes _____ No _____

3. What areas would you think would be most beneficial to parents?

   _____ School policies
   _____ Learning styles
   _____ Behavior issues
   _____ Study skills
   _____ Social skills
   _____ Outside agencies to assist learning disabled youngsters
   _____ Adolescent development
   _____ Other_____

Comments of Suggestions:

* 104 questionnaires distributed
  30 returned

APPENDIX E

PARENT LETTER

FIRST MEETING

APPENDIX E

January 28, 1992

Dear Parents/Guardian:

Our school year has ended for the first semester, and we hope your young adult has had a pleasant beginning. In an effort to enhance the understanding of your learning disabled youngster, we are attempting to send out information on various topics pertinent to you and your young adult.

In addition to this communication by mail, we are also starting a parent support group on Wednesday, February 5, 1992, at 7 p.m. at _____ High School in which we will feature guest speakers, printed information, as well as sharing of ideas and concerns between parents and professionals. These meetings will be held periodically throughout the school year. This parent support group has emerged due to the fact that parents of learning disabled young adolescents require in-depth information on a magnitude of issues in addition to academics and behavior concerns. Career opportunities, post-secondary vocations, social skills, life skills, and peer relationships are but a few matters which parents of learning disabled adolescents must handle in a unique fashion as compared to the general population. By planning ahead in a systematic manner, the future of the learning disabled young adult should be less frightening and uncertain.

It is our hope that through the parent support group we can build a bond between the professionals and the parents where there is a sense of respect, understanding, honesty and open communication for the ultimate good of all the learning disabled students.

Please feel free to comment on the articles and please try to attend the February 5 meeting.

Thank you for your time and future participation in the parent support group.

Respectfully,

_____

APPENDIX F

PARENT LETTER

SECOND MEETING

APPENDIX F

February 27, 1992

Dear Parents/Guardian:

On Thursday, March 5, 1992, the parent support group will meet at 7 p.m. at the high school. We have an exciting speaker who will give us a lasting gift for our young learning disabled adults. Our speaker this month is _____. _____ is the Director of Services at the Diagnostic Training and Opportunity Center in Cape May. She has worked with many LD young adults in employment placement and training. _____ will share characteristics of proper work behaviors and attitudes. By applying these techniques, the young adult will be more prepared to enter the work force and most importantly have the social skills to keep a job.

Please attempt to set this time aside and join us for refreshments as well as employment information for our LD young adults.

Thank you for your continued support.

Sincerely,

_____

APPENDIX G

PARENT SUPPORT EVALUATION

APPENDIX G

PARENT SUPPORT MEETING

EVALUATION

Please answer these questions below as your input is very important to us in planning future meetings.

1. How effective was the meeting in extending your knowledge in this area?

NOT AT ALL VERY

1 2 3 4

2. How did you feel about the length of the meeting?

Too long_____ Sufficient_____ Too Short_____

3. Do you have any future topics which you would like us to address?

4. If you have any questions concerning our parent support group, please feel free to contact us at 399-1290.

Thank you,

_____

_____

* This evaluation was used for the first and second meeting.

APPENDIX H

EVALUATION FOR CAREER NIGHT

APPENDIX H

April 8, 1992

Thank you for sharing this CAREER/COLLEGE Night with the Parent Support Group for Learning Disabled Students. In order to improve this event, would you please take a moment to fill out this evaluation form.

OUR SINCERE APPRECIATION FOR YOUR ATTENDANCE.

EVALUATION FOR CAREER NIGHT
April 8, 1992

1. The information was helpful to you and your youngster.

Excellent	Average	Fair	Poor
_____	_____	_____	_____

2. Presenters were knowledgeable concerning the needs of the LD student.

Excellent	Average	Fair	Poor
_____	_____	_____	_____

3. Handouts were adequate.

Excellent	Average	Fair	Poor
_____	_____	_____	_____

4. This information will assist you and your student in future career planning.

Excellent	Average	Fair	Poor
_____	_____	_____	_____

5. What could be done to improve this program?
6. How did you find out about the career night?
   Newspaper_____ Letter from school_____
   Telephone_____ Other_____ (radio, other professional, friend)
7. What other topics would you like to see addressed concerning the learning disabled young adult?
8. Would you be interested in joining the Parent Support Group for Parents of Learning Disabled Youngsters?
   Five additional parents interested.
9. Do you have a talent, occupation, etc., that you would be interested in sharing with LD students, parents or teachers?
   One.
10. The person filling out this form:
    Teacher_____ Guidance_____ Other_____
    Student_____ Parent_____

APPENDIX I

THANK-YOU NOTE

APPENDIX I

OCEAN CITY HIGH SCHOOL

PARENT SUPPORT GROUP

February 11, 1992

Dear Mr. _____:

We would like to thank you for sharing your expertise with our parent support group at our meeting on February 5, 1992. Your talk on Adolescent Development was very well presented and extremely informative.

Adolescence can be a very difficult time for parents, especially for the parents of learning disabled youngsters. We would like to commend you on the manner in which you handled each parent's concerns in an individual, caring manner. We also appreciate your handout, which may prove very helpful to an adolescent in a "crisis situation."

Thank you again for your support.

Sincerely,

_____

_____

APPENDIX J

INVITATION TO PRESENTERS

APPENDIX J

To whom it may concern:

We are planning a post-secondary school career and college fair for learning disabled students on April 8, 1992, at 7 p.m. We would appreciate any information that you can provide concerning your institution/agency. A representative, filmstrips, catalogs, and brochures would be an enormous help.

If you are able to attend or have any suggestions, please contact us at the above address.

Sincerely,

_____

_____

APPENDIX K

THANK-YOU NOTE

PRESENTERS

APPENDIX K

We would like to take this opportunity to thank you for your participation in our College and Career Night for Learning Disabled Students. Through your contribution, the evening was a tremendous success.

Parents, students and educators who attended the program expressed their appreciation and a desire to repeat this very valuable and informative evening. They have been enlightened to the many and varied opportunities that are available to the learning disabled student beyond secondary school.

Thank you gain for sharing your time and expertise with us. We hope that we may have this opportunity again.

Sincerely,

_____

_____